

cost-of-living allowance increase at this time. Do we deserve a cost-of-living allowance increase? Probably. Is now the time to enact a cost-of-living increase? Probably not.

Mr. DREIER, my good friend, you and I are in disagreement on this, but we can do so agreeably, hopefully.

Anytime you are talking about money, Mr. Speaker, sometimes emotions become frayed, and volatile activity may result. But I don't want to offend anybody, especially the gentleman who yielded to me. But I feel very strongly about this, and I thank you, Mr. DREIER, for having yielded to me.

Ms. MATSUI. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentlewoman from California (Ms. LEE).

Ms. LEE. Mr. Speaker, let me just thank the gentlewoman from California for yielding and thank her also for her steady and solid work on the Rules Committee.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of this rule and the underlying Financial Services appropriations bill. I would like to thank my friend Chairman SERRANO for his leadership and commitment to consumer issues in this spending bill and for his work on Cuba. To that end, I want to raise an issue I know that the chairman and I agree on, and that is ending the travel ban to Cuba.

I intended to offer an amendment to prohibit the Office of Foreign Asset Control from enforcing the travel ban for students, but was unable to for procedural reasons. Allowing student travel to Cuba for students to study will go a long way to foster peace and security in our region and, quite frankly, sets a good example for the type of connections and collaboration that we need to foster understanding between different cultures and countries.

Students are some of the best ambassadors, highlighting the best in our country. For the life of me, it makes no sense and I do not understand why, first of all, why this embargo exists when Americans have the right to travel wherever they so desire. That is fundamental in our democracy. But why we would keep our young people from going to Cuba to study? It makes no sense. Young people can study in China. They can study in Vietnam. Why in the world can't they study in Cuba?

We are going to continue to work on that until our young people have that right to travel and study wherever they so desire. This is an important issue, and, again, I am going to continue to work to lift this inconsistent and costly travel ban, but also to end this very ill-advised and ineffective 40-year embargo against Cuba.

Mr. DREIER. Mr. Speaker, I am happy to yield 5 minutes to my very good friend from Omaha, Nebraska (Mr. TERRY).

Mr. TERRY. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman, and I rise not only in opposition to the rule, but respectfully

request that my colleagues join me in voting "no" on the previous question.

I have drafted an amendment that would freeze our salaries for this year, much like we voted to do in the last year. We are not going to have the opportunity then to have a straight-up vote on that amendment during this appropriations bill. So our one opportunity to voice our opinion on the COLA, the cost-of-living increase, which is somewhere probably around 2.5 percent, I don't know the number itself, but that happens automatically unless we have a straight-up vote to suspend it, and we are going to be denied that opportunity. So I respectfully request that all of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle join me in voting against the previous question.

Now, let me state some of the reasons why I think it is important that we freeze our salaries again for next year.

First of all, I don't think we deserve it. Our approval rating with the American public is 14 percent, according to Gallup, the lowest in the history of polling. Obviously we are doing something wrong if the people have such little confidence in us.

I think there are a variety of reasons why the people have less confidence in us now than they even did last year, and I think one is because of maybe the viciousness and the partisanship is probably at an all-time record high. We have our political opponents that think we are down and want to put their heels on our throats and keep us that way, and I am not sure that is what the American people want.

But then let's look at effectiveness. In the major bills that have come through the House of Representatives, the congressional leadership, and I say that in toto, House and Senate, have gotten very few bills to the White House for signature. In fact, we have done a variety of resolutions and bills, many of them condemning what Republicans had done in the past. But out of 60 bills that have gone through the House in our first 6 months, since January 4, 2 have been signed into law, and that is it.

Now, if we were on a baseball team, and we hit 2 out of 60, or less than 1 percent, a .033 percentage, we would be sent down to Single A ball for such a pathetic percentage. So we are not performing well enough to deserve it.

Now, I do want to bring up one other aspect. Usually what happens with the cost-of-living increase is we have a token vote on the previous question, and there is an arrangement basically for the votes to be there to allow the previous question to go forward for the rule, with a gentleman's agreement that those who vote "yes" won't have to pay for it in the elections. But the reality of that is that is off the table.

This is just one of the many ads run against Republican incumbents who voted for the previous question last year. This is paid for by the Democrat Congressional Committee against In-

cumbents Who Vote for the Previous Question.

So I think it is important to warn everyone that comes here that is going to vote on the previous question, which is the vote for a congressional pay freeze for our next year's salaries, that if you are a Republican, DCCC is going to run ads against you, and since that agreement is off the table, if you are on my friend's side of the aisle over here, the Democrat side, the agreement is off also if you vote for it. Maybe the Republican National Congressional Committee will be running ads against you for voting for a pay raise, and maybe it is because we haven't made the Bush cuts permanent that will raise taxes on American families, or maybe it is just because of the lack of productivity in the House that protects our families. There are a variety of reasons.

But the reality is there is no such agreement left, folks. Vote against the previous question and protect yourself.

Ms. MATSUI. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Utah (Mr. MATHESON).

Mr. MATHESON. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to urge my fellow Members to oppose the previous question, and I welcome my colleague from Nebraska. It has been a lonely exercise for me the last few years, and I am glad to have someone else join me on the floor and make this request, because I do think having some transparency and having accountability and having an up-or-down vote on the COLA makes a lot of sense.

These are difficult times in our Nation. We are fighting terrorism on so many fronts, our economy faces some challenges, and our future budget deficits continues to be projected in the future at great levels.

So I don't think this is the right time for Members of Congress to be allowing a pay raise to go through without even an up-or-down vote. We need to show the American people we are willing to make some sacrifices. We need to budget and live within our means and make careful spending decisions based on our most pressing priorities.

So, Mr. Speaker, let us send a signal to the American people that we recognize there is a struggle today for some in today's economy. Vote "no" on the previous question so we can have an opportunity to block the automatic cost-of-living adjustment to Members of Congress. Regardless of how Members feel about this issue, they should all be willing to make their position public and on the record. A "no" vote will allow Members to vote up or down on the COLA.

If the previous question is defeated, I also would intend to offer an amendment to the rule, and my amendment would block the fiscal year 2008 automatic cost-of-living pay raise for Members of Congress. Because this amendment requires a waiver, the only way to get to this issue is to defeat the previous question. So therefore I urge Members to vote no on the previous question.